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Iranian students, UK professor return to jail to finish sentences

Three Iranian students and former University of Kentucky professor George Potratz voluntarily returned to the Metro Detention Center Monday.

They'll serve the remainder of jail terms they were given late last year after being convicted of disrupting the April 1978 speech of CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

The students and professor had been out on bond, posted by John T. Smiley, a 68-year-old Mt. Sterling man.

"The spring semester has ended (for the Iranian students and Potratz)," said Smiley, who met the four outside the jail. "And they've decided to finish the sentences."

Potratz, who'd taught English at UK for seven years, is undecided about what he'll do after serving 73 more days behind bars. His contract was not renewed by the university, he said, because he had failed to write a book — a requirement for obtaining

tenure at the school.

But the three Iranians, Manouchehr Yaghmaee, 29, Ahmad Davari-Nejad, 22, and Saeed Farzangar, 26, will return to their native country after their jail terms are complete.

"They'll go back as heroes," said Smiley, reflecting on his association with the three Iranians and five others he bailed out after the conviction last fall in District Court.

The Iranians had protested Turner's speech at Memorial Coliseum. They were angry over what they saw as the CIA's undercover efforts to keep the shah of Iran in power.

The shah was eventually overthrown by revolution and is now in exile.

News reports from Iran indicate that the country's current rulers have executed dozens of political opponents.

But Yaghmaee discounted the reports. "It is a very good situation in my country now," he said. "Everybody is satisfied."

"There are some problems," he continued, "but just the kinds of things you'd expect after a revolution."

The three Iranians and Potratz will join three other Iranian students in jail who were also convicted of disrupting the CIA director's speech — Nader Eshgi, Yahya Omani and Mehran Saffari, who will finish their sentences on June 4 and return to Iran.

Two other Iranian students, Abdor-eza Barzegar and Morteza Khajehzadeh, left jail for their homeland two weeks ago.

All were originally given 45 to 90-day sentences, but serving the jail time was delayed while the conviction was appealed twice. Fayette Circuit Court upheld the conviction, while the second appeal is still pending before the state Court of Appeals.

But Yaghmaee and the others who

went back to jail Monday doubt if they will be issued a favorable ruling.

Smiley said he posted more than \$125,000 in bail money because he thought the students and professor had been mistreated by the courts. "I'm not in the bond business," he said. "But when I saw this thing happening I had to get involved."

Smiley said bail had been set at \$15,000 each for the Iranians and at only \$5,000 for the American. In either case, Smiley said it was an excessive amount for the crime, which would have merited a \$10 fine if the defendants had pleaded guilty.

"If I hadn't put up the money last fall, they would have lost their visas as students and would have been deported to Iran," said Smiley. "The shah was still in power then, and they would have been killed. But I say now they'll go back as heroes."

Smiley agreed with the students' view of the new Moslem revolutionary state in Iran. "I think the country's getting better every day," he said.

The students say their experience in Lexington shows them that political opposition in the United States is suppressed.